# THE EPISTLES OF PAUL.

THE Epistles of the Apostle Paul have a very distinctive character. All Scripture, up to the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion, looks forward to the cross, and has primarily in view Israel, and the blessing of the earth through the Messianic kingdom. But "hid in God" (Eph. 3. 9) was an unrevealed *fact*—the interval of time between the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and His return in glory; and an unrevealed *purpose*—the outcalling of the *ecclesia*, the church which is Christ's body. In Mt. 16. our Lord announced that purpose, but wholly without explanation as to how, when, or of what materials, that church should be built, or what should be its position, relationships, privileges, or duties.

All this constitutes precisely the scope of the Epistles of Paul. They develop the doctrine of the church. In his letters to seven Gentile churches (in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica), the church, the "mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God" (Eph. 3. 9), is fully revealed, and fully instructed as to her unique place in the counsels and purposes of God.

Through Paul alone we know that the church is not an organization, but an organism, the body of Christ; instinct with His life, and heavenly in calling, promise, and destiny. Through him alone we know the nature, purpose, and form of organization of local churches, and the right conduct of such gatherings. Through him alone do we know that "we shall not all sleep," that "the dead in Christ shall rise first," and that living saints shall be "changed" and caught up to meet the Lord in the air at His return.

But to Paul was also committed the unfolding of the doctrines of grace which were latent in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Paul originates nothing, but unfolds everything, concerning the nature and purpose of the law; the ground and means of the believer's justification, sanctification, and glory; the meanings of the death of Christ, and the position, walk, expectation, and service of the Christian.

Paul, converted by the personal ministry of the Lord in glory, is distinctively the witness to a glorified Christ, Head over all things to the church which is His body, as the Eleven were to Christ in the flesh, the Son of Abraham and of David.

The chronological order of Paul's Epistles is believed to be as follows: 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy. Hebrews has a distinctive place, nor can the order of that book amongst the writings of Paul be definitely fixed.

## THE TWO SILENCES

TWO periods in the life of Paul after his conversion are passed over in a silence which is itself significant—the journey into Arabia, from which the Apostle returned in full possession of the Gospel explanation as set forth in Galatians and Romans; and the two silent years in prison in Cæsarea, between his arrest in the temple at Jerusalem and his deportation to Rome.

It was inevitable that a trained intellect like that of Paul, a convinced believer in Mosaism and, until his conversion on the Damascus road, an eager opposer of Christianity, must seek the underlying principles of the Gospel. He immediately preached Jesus as the Messiah; but the relation of the Gospel to the Law, and, in a lesser degree, to the great Jewish promises, needed clear adjustment if Christianity was to be a reasonable faith, and not a mere dogma. In Arabia Paul sought and found that adjustment through revelation by the Spirit. Out of it came the doctrinal explanation of salvation by grace through faith, wholly apart from the law, embodied in Galatians and Romans.

But the Gospel brings the believer into great relationships—to the Father, to other believers, to Christ, and to the future purposes of God. It is not only a salvation from sin and the consequences of sin, but into an amazing place in the Divine counsels. Furthermore, the new thing, the church in its various aspects and functions, demanded clear revelation. And these are the chief themes of the Epistles written by Paul from Rome, and commonly called the Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. It is contrary to the method of inspiration, as explained by Paul himself, to suppose that these crowning revelations were made apart from deep meditation, demanding quietness, and earnest seeking. It seems most congruous with the events of Paul's life to suppose that these great revelations came during the silent years at Cæsarea—often spoken of as wasted.

## HOW TO USE THE SUBJECT REFERENCES.

THE subject references lead the reader from the first clear mention of a great truth to the last. The first and last references (in parenthesis) are repeated each time, so that wherever a reader comes upon a subject he may recur to the first reference and follow the subject, or turn at once to the Summary at the last reference.

### ILLUSTRATION

(at Mark 1. 1.)

| |
|---|
| *b Gospel.* vs. 1,14,15; Mk. 8.35. (Gen. 12.1-3; Rev. 14.6.) |

Here *Gospel* is the subject; vs. 1, 14, 15 show where it is at that particular place; Mk. 8. 35 is the next reference in the chain, and the references in parenthesis are the first and last.